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Source: *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 644-679
Published by: University of California Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4138386
Accessed: 26/07/2009 13:04

Debussy and *La Sonate cyclique*

MARIANNE WHEELDON

Debussy's early career in chamber music began and ended with the String Quartet of 1893.[1] Surrounded by song collections—*Fêtes galantes* (1891), *Trois mélodies* (1891), and *Proses lyriques* (1894)—the quartet stands out as the lone chamber composition of this period, despite Debussy's plans to the contrary. As Edward Lockspeiser notes:

> On the face of it, this venture into chamber music is surprising. Planned to be followed by a piano and violin sonata and a second string quartet (a section of which was announced in March 1894 as having been written), it represents a temporary renunciation of literary and pictorial allegiances and the adoption of a traditional outlook to which, very much later, there was to be an enthusiastic return.[2]

The return to which Lockspeiser refers occurred with the three instrumental sonatas composed between 1915 and 1917: the Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915), the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp (1915), and the Sonata for Violin and Piano (1917). Along with the *Douze Études* (1915), these works represent what the composer described as a return to "pure music."[3] Here Debussy again drops the "literary and pictorial allegiances" of his previous compositions and uses classicizing titles for the first time since the early quartet. And just as with that earlier endeavor, Debussy's immediate plans now included other chamber works

[1] Two chamber works exist from Debussy's student years, both unpublished during his lifetime: the Piano Trio (1880) and the *Nocturne et Scherzo* for cello and piano (1882).

[2] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1962–65), 125.

[3] Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols, trans. Roger Nichols (London: Faber, 1987), 309.

The Journal of Musicology, Vol. 22, Issue 4, pp. 644–679, ISSN 0277-9269, electronic ISSN 1533-8347.

that were never realized. The three sonatas were only half of an intended group of six: The fourth sonata was to be for oboe, horn, and harpsichord; the fifth for trumpet, bassoon, and clarinet; while the sixth sonata was to "combine all those [instruments] used in the previous five."[4]

What draws these early and late chamber works even closer together is that they are all cyclic in their construction. That is, the movements of the works are connected by schemes of prominent thematic recollection. As one would expect with compositions separated by so many years, the approach to cyclicism differs considerably. While the early quartet clearly bears the imprint of César Franck's cyclic procedures, his late sonatas engage with this tradition more cautiously. One reason why this may be so is that in the intervening years the cyclic sonata came to be associated less with Franck and more with his student Vincent d'Indy, so much so that this compositional procedure acquired the philosophical and political baggage associated with the latter composer. D'Indy's teachings and writings (as published in his *Cours de composition musicale*) promulgated a certain view of the cyclic sonata, one that influenced a generation of composers, and perhaps even tempered Debussy's use of this form in his late compositions.

Cyclic Design in Debussy's Quartet

The influence of Franck on Debussy's early career extends beyond the string quartet. As James Briscoe states, "the young Debussy frequently turned to Franck for models of structure in instrumental music."[5] Table 1 summarizes Briscoe's observations on the correspondences between the two composers' works, beginning as early as Debussy's second *envoi de Rome, Printemps* of 1887. In each case, Debussy emulates the genre and instrumental forces of a Franck composition from a few years before. This outward similarity is made all the more evident by the fact that each of Debussy's completed works employs cyclic procedures.

Several interpretations may be posited as to why Debussy modeled his works so closely on Franck's. One interpretation is that he was genuinely attracted to the older composer's music, having gravitated toward Franck as early as the Fall of 1880, when he audited Franck's organ class at the Conservatoire. This course, because of its overwhelming emphasis on improvisation, was an unofficial composition class, attracting a roster of composers that included Chausson, d'Indy, Ropartz, and de Bréville. Although Debussy seems to have lasted only six months as an

4 Ibid., 303–4 and n2.

5 James R. Briscoe, "Debussy, Franck, and the 'Idea of Sacrifice,' " *Revue belge de musicologie* 45 (1991): 28.

TABLE 1

Correspondences between the works of Franck and Debussy

Franck	Debussy
Psyché (1886)	*Printemps* (1887)
Symphonic poem with chorus	Symphonic suite with chorus
Variations symphoniques (1885)	*Fantaisie* (1889)
Concerto for piano and orchestra	Concerto for piano and orchestra
String Quartet in D major (1889)	String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10 (1893)
Violin Sonata (1886)	Projected Violin Sonata (1894)

auditor,[6] some of his comments from this period show that he admired Franck's works if not his teaching style. A conversation between Debussy and his composition teacher Ernest Guiraud in 1889 (recorded by Maurice Emmanuel) finds Debussy speaking enthusiastically about Franck's Symphony in D minor (1889): "I could do with fewer four-bar phrases. But what splendid ideas! I even prefer it to the Quintet, which I used to find thrilling."[7] In an article of 1903, Debussy continues to speak favorably of Franck, and despite a few reservations he praises the composer for his "wise, calm genius" and "real devotion to music."[8] In this light, it would seem that Debussy's early imitation of Franck stemmed from a true regard for the composer.

Another more cynical interpretation is that the young Debussy was "a bit of a social climber" and very ambitious.[9] At first attracted to the aristocratic clique of the "bande à Franck" at the Conservatoire, upon his return from Rome in 1887 Debussy strove to ingratiate himself with d'Indy and the Franck circle at the Société Nationale in order to get his works performed. One manifestation of this flattery was Debussy's emulation of their esteemed teacher's compositions. This seems to have worked, as both the *Fantaisie* and the quartet were scheduled to have

[6] John R. Clevenger, "Debussy's Paris Conservatoire Training," in Jane F. Fulcher, ed., *Debussy and His World* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 301.

[7] Arthur Hoérée, "Les entretiens Debussy-Guiraud (1889–1890)," *L'Avant-scène opera [Puccini-Tosca]* 11 (Sept.-Oct. 1977): 144. Trans. from Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, ed. François Lesure, trans. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Knopf, 1977), 176n3.

[8] Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, 172–73.

[9] Michael Strasser states: "Debussy was, to state it bluntly, a bit of a social climber, always evincing a desire to mingle with the upper crust of society. It seems likely that the social status of the Franckists played a role in Debussy's interest in associating with them." See Michael Creasman Strasser, "Ars Gallica: The Société Nationale de Musique and its Role in French Musical Life, 1871–1891" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1998), 462–63.

their premieres at the Société Nationale: Although the first performance of the *Fantaisie* never materialized, the string quartet premiered on 29 December 1893.[10] At this point in his career, Debussy had few major works to his name, and a first performance of a new string quartet at the Société Nationale—the home of serious French chamber music—was perhaps a calculated move on his part to cement his reputation within the ranks of the society. Moreover, according to Marcel Dietschy, Debussy was present for the premiere of Franck's quartet (on 19 April 1890), and thus must have witnessed its triumphant reception, with Franck twice called on to the platform to respond to the public applause.[11] Desirous of a successful premiere himself, three years later Debussy responded with a quartet of his own.

For these reasons, the musical relationship between Debussy's quartet and Franck's is unusually clear. As Briscoe points out, the layouts of the two works correspond closely: Both feature a "four-movement cyclic design and movements in rather similar tempos."[12] The four-movement format is unusual in itself. Franck, with the exception of the string quartet and violin sonata, always used three movements for his multi-movement works, while Debussy was never to write a four-movement work again. Both quartets follow the first movement with a scherzo, a slow movement, and a finale preceded by an introduction. Moreover, with all the potential variations in cyclic design, Debussy's quartet links its movements in a manner similar to Franck's: In both works, the first musical utterance is the cyclic theme;[13] this theme recurs prominently in the second movement (albeit in very different guises); the slow movement makes no obvious reference to the cyclic theme; and the last movement recalls themes from the preceding movements in an introduction before embarking upon the finale (Fig. 1).

The inclusion of an introductory thematic recall in the final movement was not unusual for Franck, who employed this device before in his symphony. According to his student Pierre de Bréville, Franck

[10] The *Fantaisie* was due to have its first performance at the Société Nationale on 21 April 1890, with Vincent d'Indy conducting. Owing to the length of the concert, however, d'Indy decided that only the first movement of the *Fantaisie* should be performed. Consequently, Debussy retrieved the orchestral parts at the final rehearsal, thereby preventing the next day's performance. In a letter of apology to d'Indy, Debussy states that he "would rather have a passable performance of all three movements than a fine performance of the first." See Debussy, *Letters*, 30.

[11] Marcel Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy*, ed. and trans. William Ashbrook and Margaret G. Cobb (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 76; and Léon Vallas, *César Franck*, trans. Hubert Foss (London: Harrap, 1951), 222.

[12] Briscoe, "Debussy, Franck, and the 'Idea of Sacrifice,'" 28.

[13] This is not always the case: Franck's Piano Quintet in F minor (1879) and Debussy's Cello Sonata (1915) present notable exceptions, where the cyclic theme appears as the second theme and the climactic theme respectively (both examples will be discussed below).

FIGURE 1a. Cyclic design in Franck's Quartet

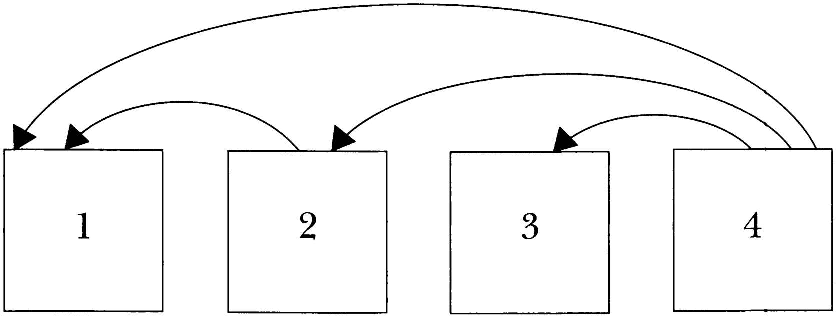
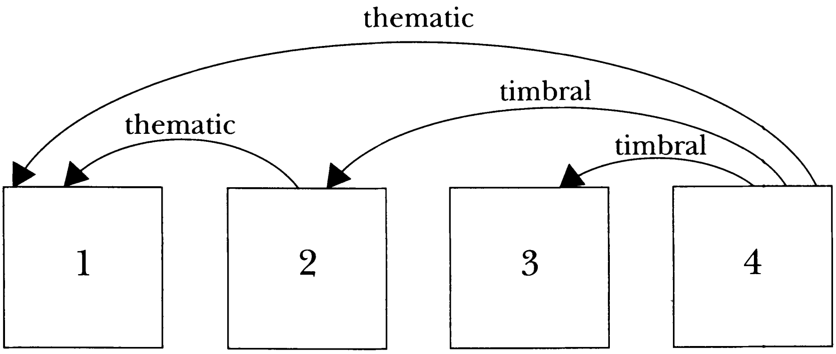


FIGURE 1b. Cyclic design in Debussy's Quartet



readily acknowledged the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to be the source of inspiration in both his symphony and his quartet.[14] Significantly, Debussy follows a comparable procedure, opening the last movement of his quartet with two distinct sections (mm. 1–14 and mm. 15–30) before the finale proper begins (Ex. 1). The first section extends the preceding slow movement's timbre, mood, and key signature (D♭ major) into the last movement. The elegiac solo cello line (mm. 1–2), later repeated by the first violin (m. 9), recalls the muted solo melodies that had opened the central section of the slow movement (mm. 28–40). In addition, the wide spacing of the D♭ major and E major chords

[14] Vallas, *César Franck*, 213 and 221.

in the opening phrases of the finale (m. 8 and m. 14) parallels the distinctive spacing of the *pianissimo* sonorities that had occurred in measure 32 and measure 35 of the slow movement. In both locations, a solo instrument initiates the phrase, while the striking disposition of the sonority—spanning four octaves, with the perfect fifth emphasized in the registral extremes—suspends this motion and closes the phrase.
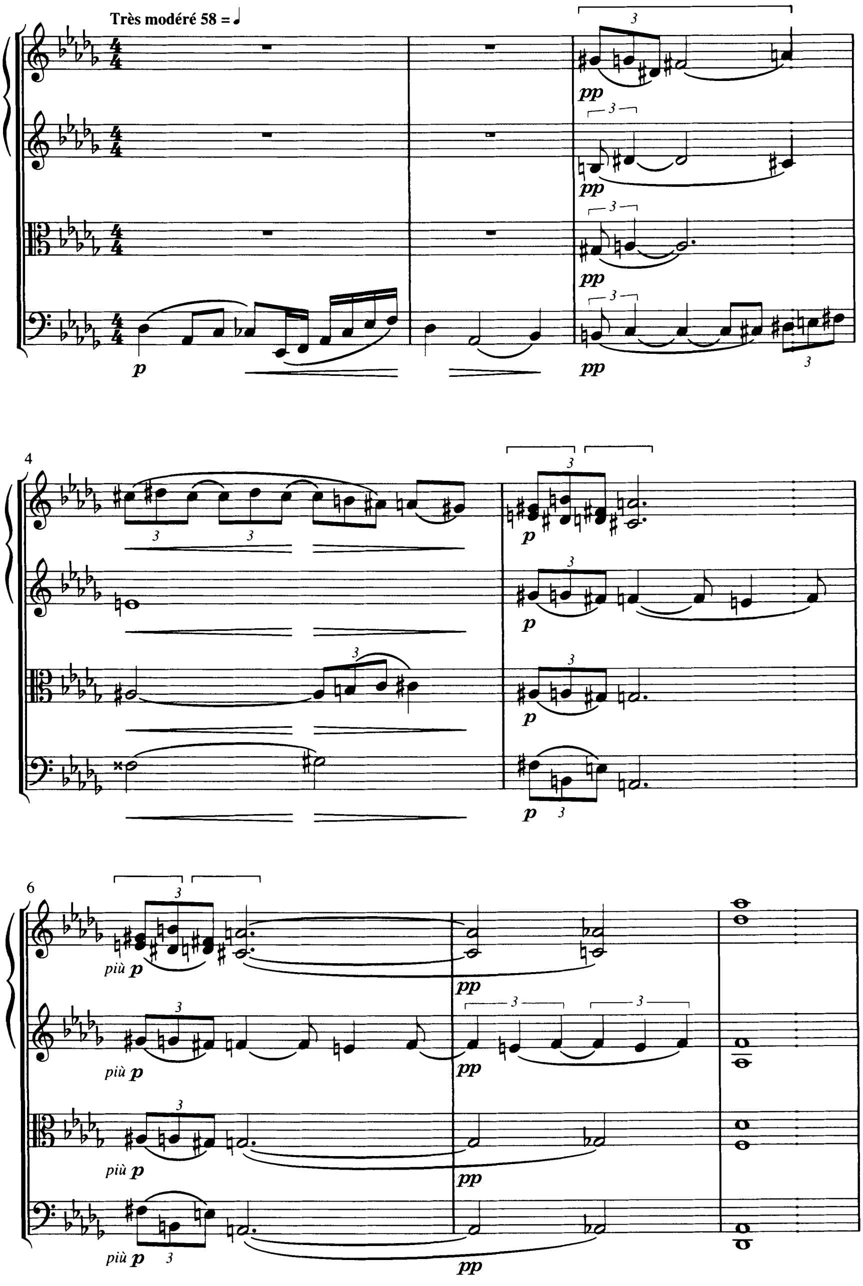
The second section of the introduction (mm. 15–30) recalls another moment in the work. The compound meter, tempo, and texture immediately bring to mind the scherzo, while the insistent repetition of a single idea—here, chromatic descending thirds—recalls the persistent cyclic-theme ostinato of that movement.[15] In addition, the *forte* chromatic descent of all the instruments in measures 25–28 evokes the climactic whole-tone descent that had occurred toward the end of the scherzo (mm. 155–59), which was itself a singular moment of timbral homogeneity.[16]

In establishing such distinct textures, Debussy creates a unique and recognizable timbral identity for each of his central movements, identities that he is able to draw upon in the same manner in which he draws upon his cyclic theme. In so doing, he elevates the role of timbre in his quartet, more usually consigned to a secondary or supporting role in the workings of a composition. For Debussy, the timbres of his central movements are no longer merely decorative but now become recognizable elements of his form. In this way, he effects a "timbral recall" of the preceding two movements, alluding to—while ultimately sidestepping—the more literal thematic recall that opens the last movement of Franck's quartet (see Fig. 1b). At the same time, Debussy connects these timbrally distinct sections motivically. As Example 1 shows, both sections introduce a new figure rather than recalling specific themes: The melodic minor thirds in the first violin, which descend by step in measures 5–6 and 11–12, return and permeate the "scherzo" passage, the thirds now descending chromatically. This motive connects these
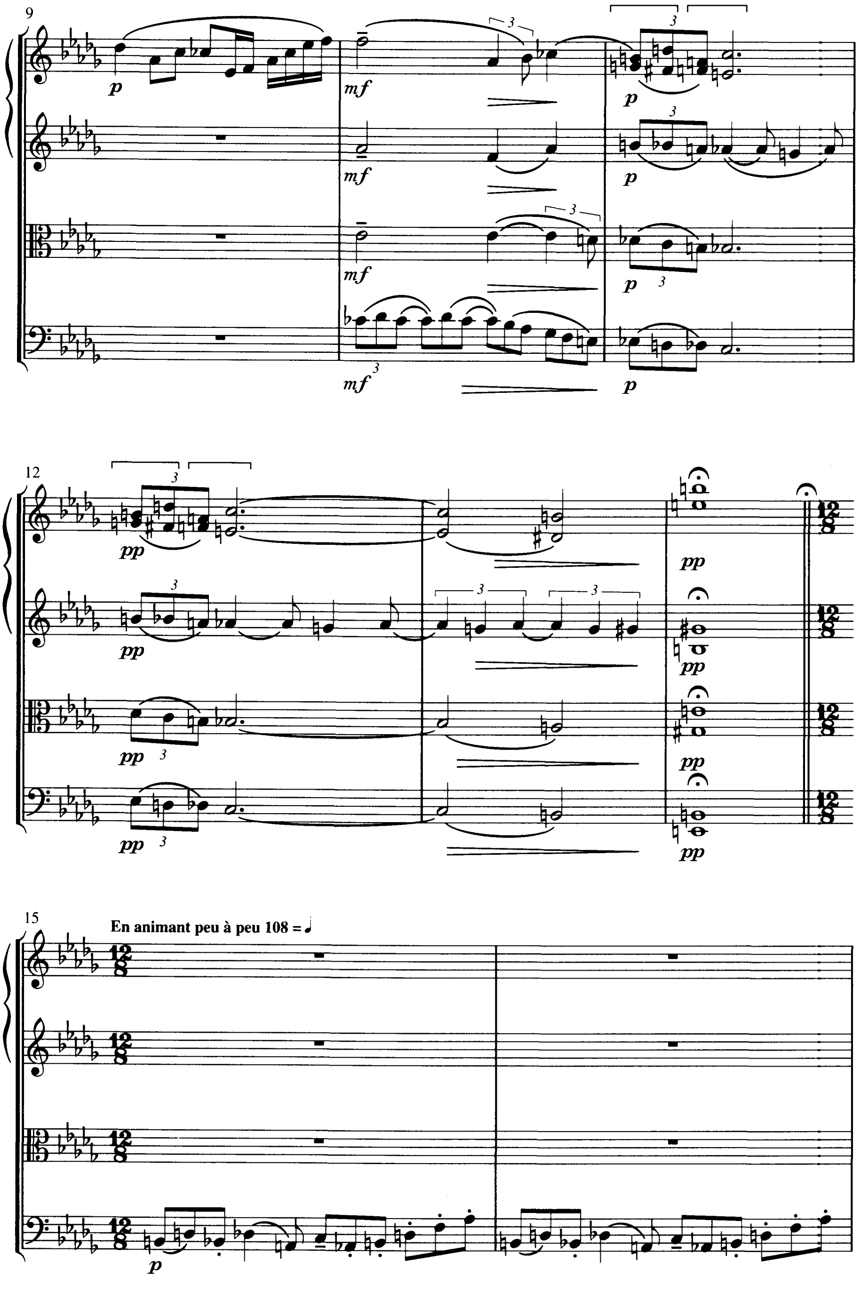
[15] Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien (New York: Dover, 1973), 91–92. Vallas interprets the opening of the last movement slightly differently: "The beginning reminds one of the last part of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony or of Franck's quartet, with its repetition—veiled or obvious—of the rhythms of the first movement, and its reminiscences of the Scherzo."

[16] The timbral similarities can even be extended to the surrounding measures, as both descending passages are paired with a rising sequence featuring similar instrumentation. In the introduction of the finale, this sequence occurs in the measures preceding the chromatic descent (mm. 21–24), and is characterized by written-out trills and tremolos in the violins, while the viola and cello share repetitions of the theme. In the scherzo, the sequence is reversed, with the whole-tone descent leading to a rising sequence of the cyclic theme. Again, the string articulations are comparable, with accompanying trills in the violin and cello, and the repetitions of the cyclic theme performed by the second violin and viola.
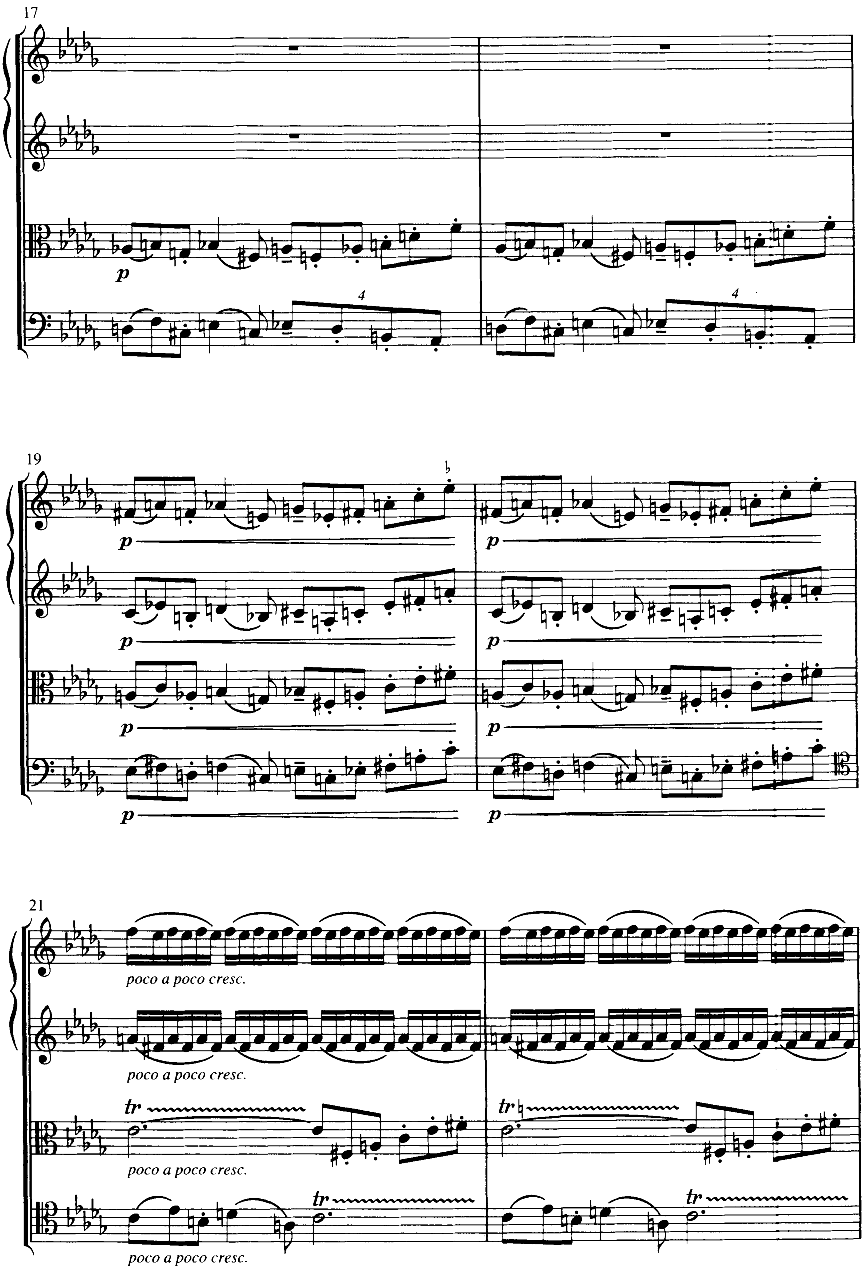
EXAMPLE 1. Debussy, String Quartet, iv, mm. 1–38
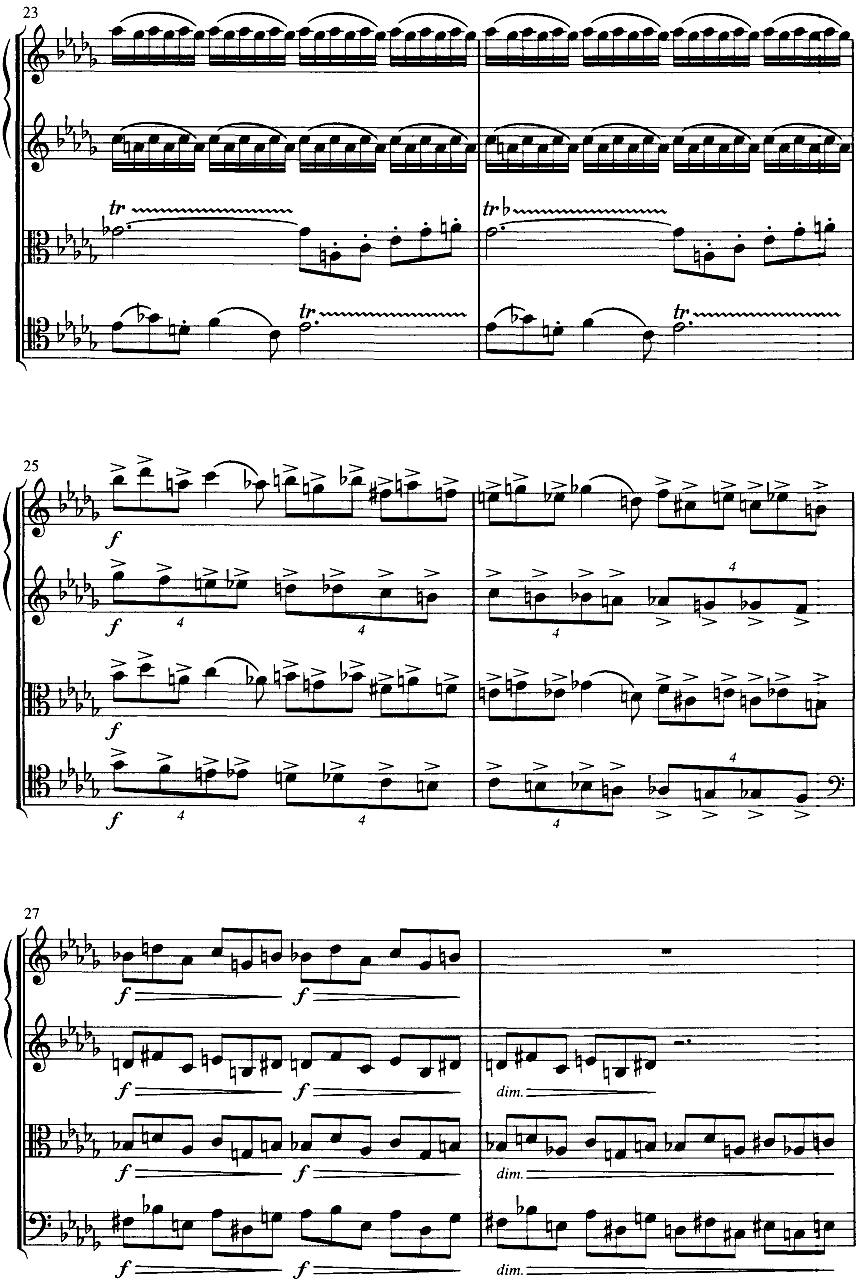


EXAMPLE 1. (*continued*)



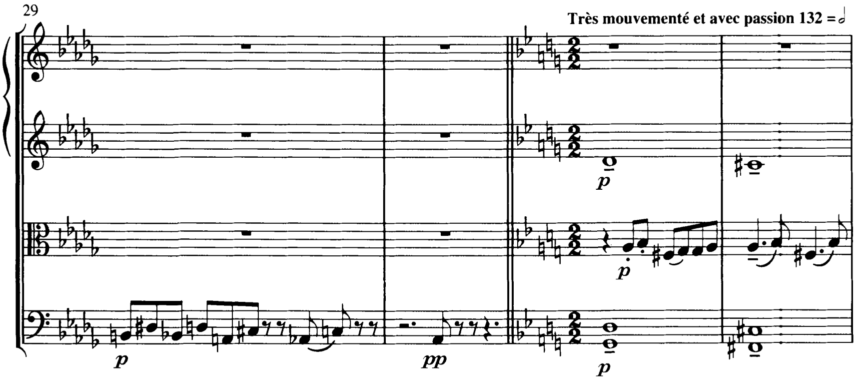
EXAMPLE 1. (*continued*)
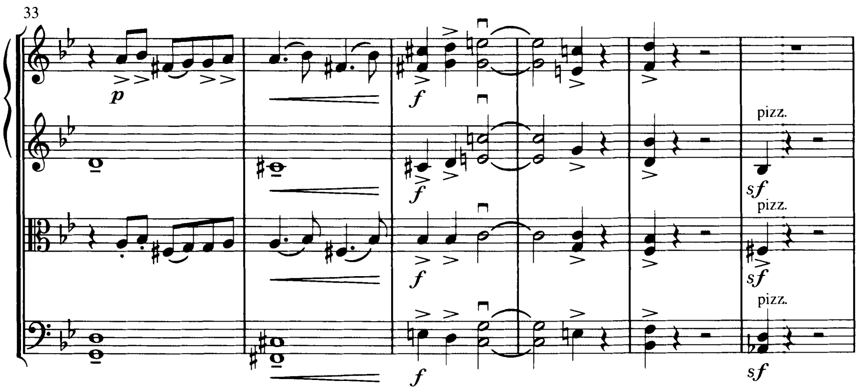


EXAMPLE 1. (*continued*)



EXAMPLE 1. (*continued*)





otherwise contrasting sections, while a partial quotation of the quartet's cyclic theme in measure 3 subtly links the introduction to the work as a whole.

In both quartets, the significance of Franck's thematic recall and Debussy's timbral analogue extends beyond the introduction. Franck states: "As in the Ninth Symphony, I begin by calling up again the thematic ideas of the preceding movements, but after their recall I do not leave them alone and in silence; I make use of them in the development of the movement."[17] Similarly, Debussy refers to the timbral recall of his introduction partway through the finale (Ex. 2). The tempo of measures 1–14 returns as Tempo I in measure 125, along with a change of key signature to five sharps and a performance direction (*doux et*

[17] Quoted in Vallas, *César Franck*, 221.

expressif) that recalls the slow movement (*doucement expressif*). While B major is the implied tonality of this section (mm. 125–40), the first five measures sustain a C♯ minor triad, thereby alluding to the key of the central section of the slow movement.[18] Following this, the performance direction *Tempo rubato* (m. 141) and a key signature of C major usher in a faint reminiscence of the scherzo, with the fast-moving pizzicatos in the viola line in measures 145–48 fleetingly recalling its timbre. Both timbral allusions now present the first appearance of the quartet's cyclic theme (another reason why mm. 145–48 resemble the scherzo, with its cyclic-theme ostinato), and Debussy's use of the same thematic material again contributes to the smooth transition between sections that otherwise feature contrasting tempos and textures. Moreover, by placing the timbral recall of the slow movement and scherzo in gradually accelerating order, Debussy quickly reestablishes the original tempo of the last movement (*Très mouvementé et avec passion*), along with its main theme (m. 165). In this way, he avoids the disruption of the musical flow caused by the consistent starting and stopping inherent in thematic recall, a difficulty to which Franck arguably falls prey in the final movement of his quartet.[19]

In some respects Debussy's cyclic procedures far exceed even those of Franck's. In the second movement of Franck's quartet—a scherzo and trio—the cyclic return (of the first theme from the first movement) is confined to a single appearance, which occurs in the cello line toward the end of the trio (mm. 225–35). Though it appears only once, the quotation stands out rhythmically and timbrally, first of all with the longer note values of the augmented cyclic theme and, second, as the only nonmuted phrase in the movement. Yet its impact on the movement as a whole is negligible: A silent fermata follows the cyclic statement, and then the trio simply returns to its opening idea. In contrast, the second movement of Debussy's quartet—a scherzo with two trios—has a variant of the cyclic theme permeating almost every measure, first as an ostinato in the scherzo and then, in augmentation, as the main melodic material of both trios.[20]
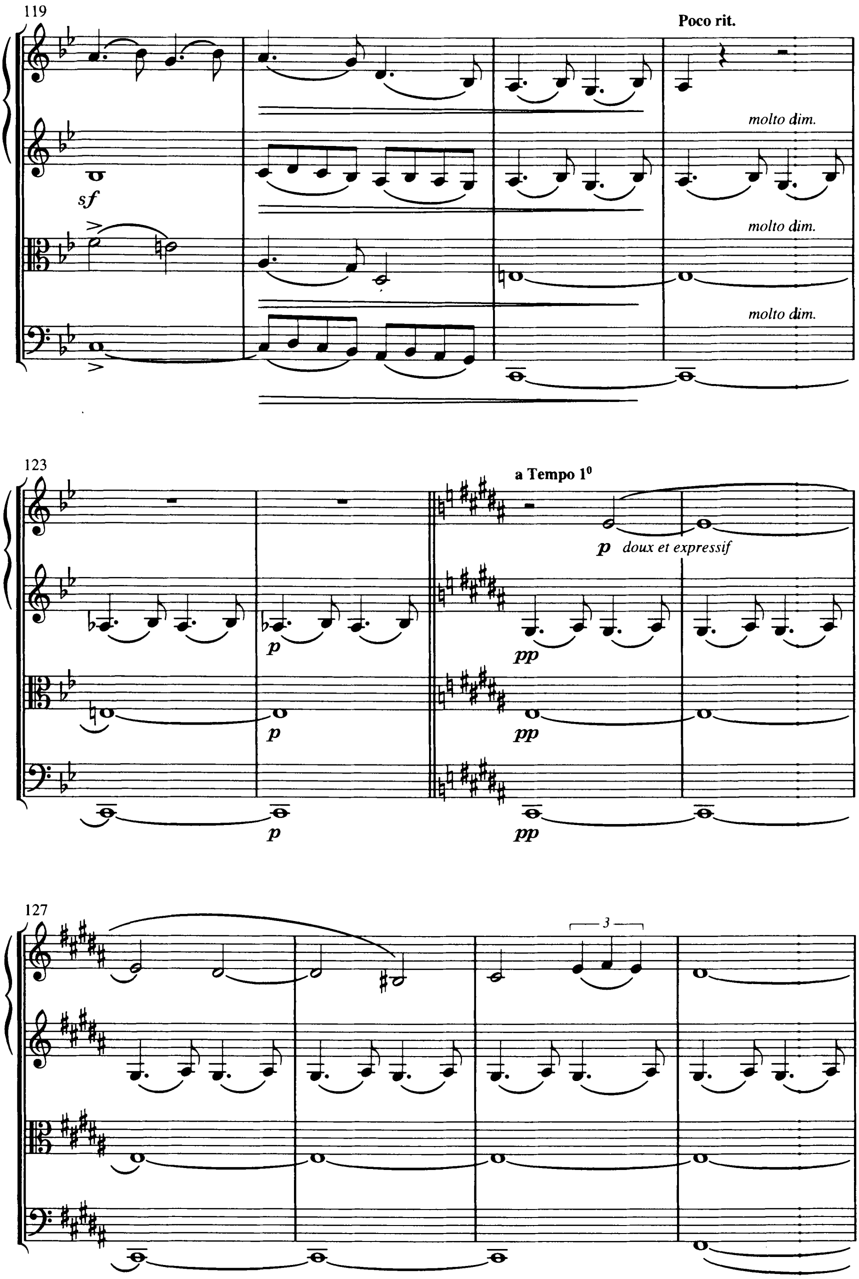
It appears that Debussy's adoption of Franck's cyclic procedures in his quartet not only helped secure its premiere at the Société but also

[18] The slow movement of Debussy's quartet begins with a key signature of D♭ major, changes to C♯ minor for the central section, and returns to D♭ major to close.
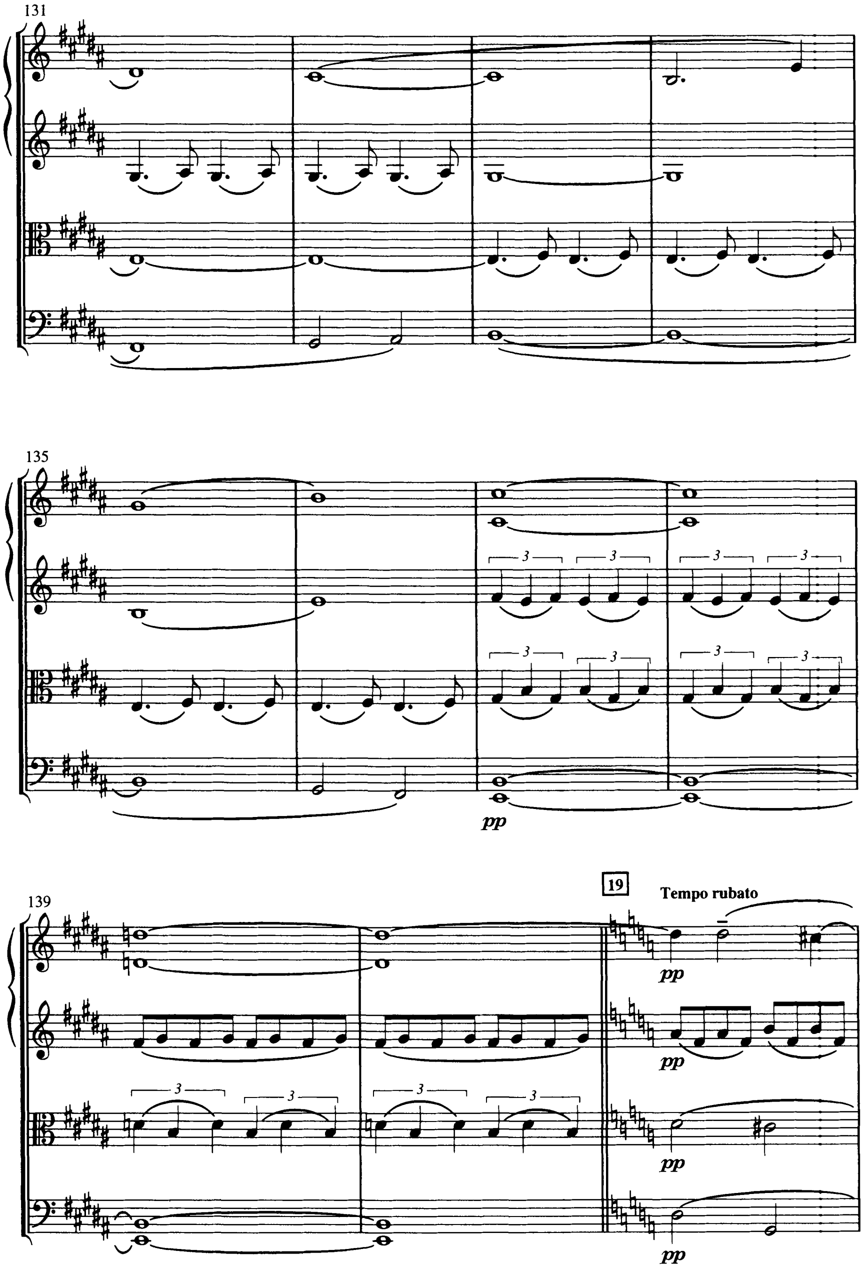
[19] Even d'Indy felt that Franck's finale was flawed. In his biography of Franck, d'Indy states: "The *Finale* is well worth studying, although it is not so spontaneous in structure as the first movement." See Vincent d'Indy, *César Franck*, trans. Rosa Newmarch (London: John Lane, 1922), 194.

[20] The variant of the cyclic theme used in the second movement originates in the central or "development" section of the first movement, which alters one note to provide a chromatic version of the opening theme.
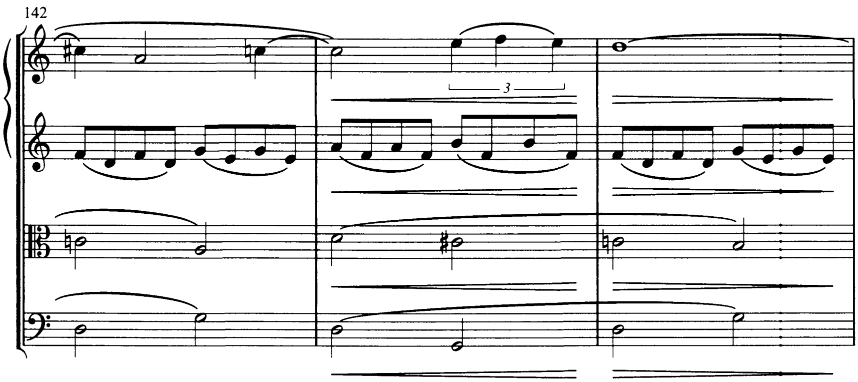
EXAMPLE 2. Debussy, String Quartet, iv, mm. 119–47
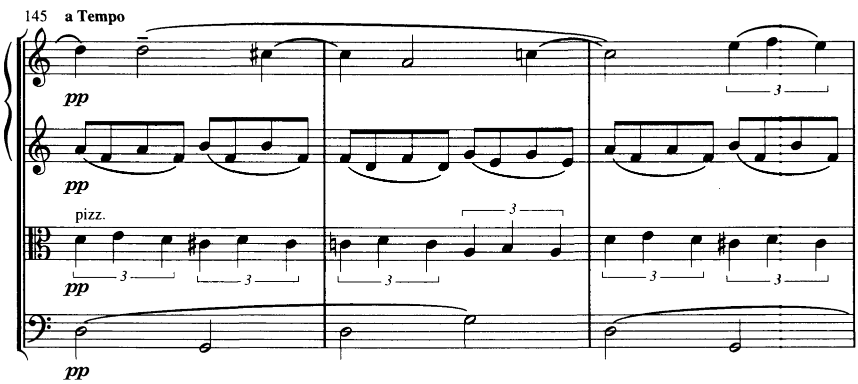


EXAMPLE 2. *(continued)*



EXAMPLE 2. (*continued*)





helped garner four repeat performances. Despite a mixed public reception, the work was readily accepted by the members of the Société, and "no other composition by Debussy appeared as frequently on the concert programs of the Société Nationale."[21] But despite this success, Debussy abandoned his future chamber projects and retreated from his association with Franck. Teresa Davidian suggests that the reason for this lies with the fact that once Debussy became part of the Executive Committee in 1893, his works "were automatically accepted for performance."[22] He no longer needed to curry favor, and his next works to be premiered by the Société were two songs from the *Proses lyriques* (February 1894) and the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (December 1894).

[21] Teresa Davidian, "Debussy's Sonata Forms" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1988), 112.

[22] Ibid., 25.

Thus what Lockspeiser describes as Debussy's "temporary renunciation of literary and pictorial allegiances" lasted little more that a year.

If nothing else, Debussy's early foray into chamber music evinced his familiarity with Franck's cyclicism and pointed toward its enduring influence on his music. Debussy did not renunciate cyclic techniques in the years between the quartet and the sonatas: They recur in the *Nocturnes* (1900), *La Mer* (1905), and the *Images* (1910–12). The appearance of the cyclic sonata in his late compositions, however, presents the first opportunity to reexamine his cyclic procedures within the realm of chamber music and, more specifically, within the formal archetype of the sonata. In the 22 years between these works, cyclic forms acquired new meanings that may help to explain Debussy's very different engagement with this tradition in his late compositions.

D'Indy and La Sonate cyclique

After Franck's death in 1890, d'Indy took it upon himself to promote his teacher's legacy, both in his teaching at the Schola Cantorum and in the *Cours de composition musicale*, a four-volume treatise based on his curriculum at the school. D'Indy compiled his lectures (with the help of his student Auguste Sérieyx) into the various volumes of the *Cours*, the first appearing in print in 1903. The chapter entitled *La Sonate cyclique*—based on d'Indy's lectures at the Schola Cantorum from 1899 to 1900—appears in volume 2 part 1, published in 1909. Here he discusses the cyclic sonata both technically and historically, and while his theoretical acumen is never in doubt, he heavily skews his historic account to favor contemporary French musicians. This bias is not simply self-serving, it also provides a vehicle for d'Indy's charged, nationalist sentiments. As Jane Fulcher has noted, "[d'Indy's] historiography was simultaneously fused with his political ideology, the genres, styles, and composers he traced were ideological enunciations."[23]

Taking Beethoven's late works as the starting point in his history of the cyclic sonata, d'Indy divides the following generations of composers into "two opposite currents." [24] The first is negative in nature, charged with the "fantastic stagnation and breaking up of the sonata form" (389,

[23] Jane F. Fulcher, "The Concert as Political Propaganda in France and the Control of 'Performative Context,'" *Musical Quarterly* 81 (1998): 41–67. See also her *French Cultural Politics and Music* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 24–35.

[24] Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale, IIe livre, 1re partie* (Paris: Durand, 1909), 389–90; Merle Montgomery, "Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, English translation of the sixth edition (1912)" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1948), 623–26. From this point forward, all citations from the chapter *La Sonate cyclique* will be given following the quotation: The first page number refers to d'Indy's *Cours*, the second to Montgomery's translation.

623). The other is positive and represents the "concentration of the sonata form in cyclic unity" (390, 626). Not surprisingly, the modern German school exemplifies the former current, while the modern French school stands for the latter. The basis for all of d'Indy's judgments in this chapter is the degree to which the cyclic unity of Beethoven's works—the *Pathétique* Sonata, the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, and the String Quartet in C♯ minor, Op. 131—was understood and developed by his successors. In d'Indy's view, it is imperative for contemporary composers to build on the achievements of the past and to advance them with innovations.[25] Because the group of composers d'Indy describes as the Romanticists—Weber, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Schumann—did not further the development of the cyclic sonata as bequeathed to them by Beethoven, they were condemned for their incompetence:

> These five composers belonging to the romantic period did not give any new impetus to the sonata form: through the effect of their inaptitude or their simple indifference for construction, they left it as it had been consecrated before them by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, restricting themselves to introducing in it this expressive exaggeration which characterizes, in all fields, the products of Romanticists [398, 640].

Following this introduction, d'Indy proceeds to excoriate each of the composers in turn for their contributions to the cyclic sonata: Weber was unacquainted with "all principle of construction" (402, 647); Schubert was deficient in "architectural talent" (402, 647); and Schumann lacked "knowledge of musical composition" in general (411, 662). As for Chopin, d'Indy believed his works suffered from an excess of "the pianistic style" (407, 655); and Mendelssohn, though proficient in assimilating musical knowledge, was without "the spirit of invention" (406, 653). In this last case, d'Indy's judgments are the products of his anti-Semitism as well as his nationalism. Admitting that Mendelssohn was "endowed with admirable faculties" (406, 653), and unable to find fault with his compositional technique, d'Indy censures the content of his works. For the other composers, the substance of his criticisms is

[25] D'Indy's comments on the development of cyclic procedures parallel his views on progress in music in general. For d'Indy, when building upon the achievements of the past, "the past" could refer to any era, not just the immediately preceding one. This view was politically expedient. As Jann Pasler notes, "For certain quasi-, would-be, or real aristocrats, the notion of progress as building on the accomplishments of the republic was unacceptable." See Jann Pasler, "Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress," in Jim Samson, ed., *The Late Romantic Era: from the Mid-19th Century to World War I* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991), 401.

similar: While recognizing their inspiration and genius in miniature compositions, he claims they are deficient as composers of large-scale works in that they cannot construct a musical edifice. Thus d'Indy concludes that "since Beethoven and the Romanticists, in reality, the German Sonata has not realized any more progress" (390, 626), and in this way he illustrates the "almost total stagnation of the sonata form" (388, 622–23).

D'Indy continues to clear a path through the 19th century with his next group of musicians, the Modern German School, which comprises Raff, Reinecke, Rubinstein, Brahms, and Grieg. Although he acknowledges that three of these composers are not German—Raff is Swiss, Rubinstein is Russian, and Grieg is Norwegian—he claims that they have assimilated the German style to such a degree that they are representative of that school. D'Indy then dismisses the sonata contributions of Raff, Reinecke, Rubinstein, and Grieg in short order; but with Brahms he confronted an obvious stumbling block. Unable to accuse Brahms for any indifference to Beethoven's legacy or an inability to construct large-scale works, d'Indy concedes that Brahms "alone perhaps among the Germans . . . inherited a little of the Beethovian gift for the development of ideas" (415, 670). As with Mendelssohn, then, d'Indy's criticisms of Brahms lie not with an inability to construct, but with matters of musical content. Brahms's style is "heavy and indigestible," and while he is a "conscientious musician, full of reverence for his art and for the masters," d'Indy believes that "many of his works are constrained and tedious to hear" (415, 670).

In this way, d'Indy dispatches an entire generation of German composers in order to forge a direct connection between Beethoven and the Modern French School or, more specifically, between late Beethoven and Franck:

> The cyclic tradition can therefore be considered as directly transmitted from Beethoven to César Franck who, less than fifteen years after the appearance of the last cyclic quartets by Beethoven (1826), knew how to profit from the marvelous teachings which they contain, in his first Trio in F♯, published in 1841 [422, 680].

The fact that Franck, a Belgian, is firmly installed as the leader of a modern French school, itself founded upon the late works of Beethoven, a German, was apparently not a cause for concern. D'Indy justifies his position by noting that Franck was born in Liège in 1822, when this city was officially part of the French-dominated Walloon district, not yet known as Belgium. Second, Beethoven—regardless of nationality—was indisputably a composer to be reckoned with in all future musical developments. In d'Indy's opinion, only the modern French school
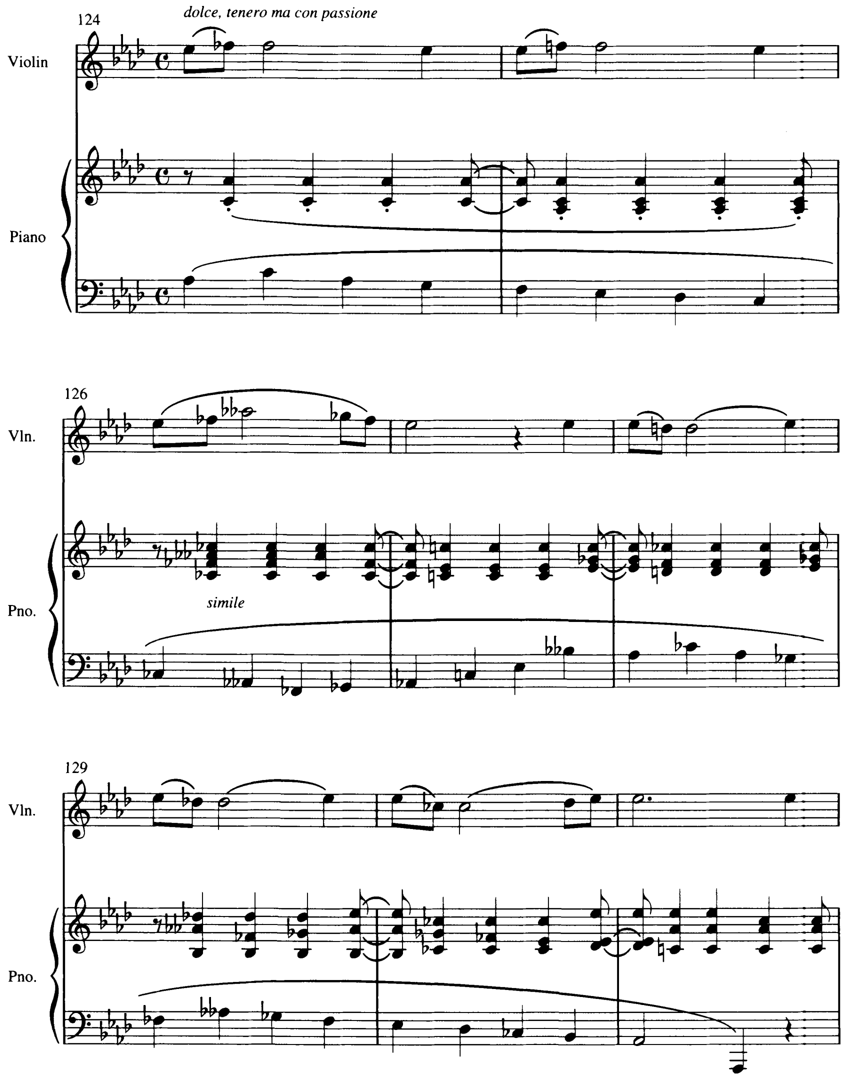
comprising Franck, Saint-Saëns, Castillon, Fauré, d'Indy, and Dukas succeeded in building on Beethoven's legacy with works that acknowledged and expanded on his cyclicism.

While d'Indy's historical views are interesting perhaps only for the magnitude of their distortion, his observations on cyclic procedures—especially as manifested in Franck's compositions—are often astute. The chapter on *La Sonate cyclique* begins the discussion of unity in multimovement works by stating that "the sonata is the prototype of all the symphonic forms which became cyclic after it" (375, 600). Here d'Indy refers not simply to the instrumental sonata. Any work that follows sonata principles is included under the rubric of the cyclic sonata, so that his discussion includes examples from symphonies and chamber works in addition to actual sonatas.

D'Indy discusses in turn the characteristics of a cyclic theme, the types of variation this theme undergoes from one movement to another, and the relation of the cyclic design to the tonality of the work. He begins with the qualities necessary for a cyclic theme, which he states must be "expressed, transmitted with the aid of easily recognizable exterior signs" (378, 606). These exterior signs constitute the memorable musical details—the particular and precise design—that will allow the theme to be identified from movement to movement, despite changes in its harmonic, rhythmic, and even melodic setting. An example that d'Indy cites in this regard is the cyclic theme from Franck's Piano Quintet in F minor (Ex. 3). The principal idea in question doubles as the second theme, an eight-measure period in the key of A♭, the relative major. D'Indy points to the "remarkable peculiarity" of the melody, describing how the second phrase arises by inverting the intervals of the first (380–81, 610). Furthermore, he mentions the theme's unusual harmonies, and though he does not provide any more detail, one can speculate that he is referring to the unusual F♭ major sonority (double mode mixture) in the first phrase and the brief tonicization of C♭ major (simple mode mixture) in the second.

D'Indy posits this passage as exemplifying the characteristics of a cyclic theme, and yet the piano quintet is exceptional for the length of its cyclic statement. In Franck's violin sonata and in the string quartet, the "exterior signs" distinguishing the cyclic theme are much smaller (Exs. 4a and 4b). In the violin sonata, it is simply the descending and ascending thirds of the violin's opening phrase. In the quartet, the melodic contour of the opening two measures, with a descending triad followed by a memorable ascending leap of a tenth, form the exterior signs. If we extend d'Indy's discussion to include the cyclic theme of Debussy's quartet, one can see that it is likewise quite short; its "exterior signs" are limited to the melodic contour of the first measure combined

EXAMPLE 3. Franck, Piano Quintet, i, mm. 124–31
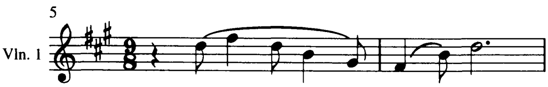


with the distinctive triplet rhythm, always positioned as an anacrusis within the measure (Ex. 4c).
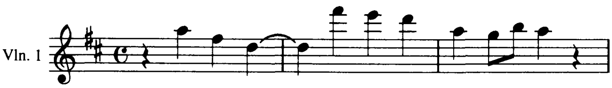
Once established, the cyclic theme must return in most, if not all, of the following movements. According to d'Indy, the cyclic theme should undergo modification—either rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, or any of these in combination—with each subsequent appearance. But the theme should change only to the extent necessary for it to fit into

EXAMPLE 4

(a) Franck, Violin Sonata, i, mm. 5–6



(b) Franck, String Quartet, i, mm. 1–3



(c) Debussy, String Quartet, i, mm. 1–2



its new environment, since it must always remain easily recognizable. In this sense, the cyclic theme undergoes variation rather than development, and d'Indy takes care to distinguish between the variation of the cyclic theme that occurs between movements and the often separate processes of organic development that take place within a movement. This is the case in the scherzo of Franck's string quartet (discussed above), but also in the subsequent movements of the piano quintet, where the cyclic theme is recalled but no attempt is made to integrate it fully into the workings of the movement.[26]

While d'Indy does not criticize Franck for this lack of integration, he does hold up Franck's violin sonata to be "the first and purest model of the use of cyclic themes in the sonata form" (423, 682), thereby placing it above the piano quintet for its greater mastery of cyclic construction. Here d'Indy's historical vision obviously colors his theoretical judgments, for if the role of contemporary composers is to further the innovations of the past, then the cyclic sonata increases in worth only when the level of intramovement unity or cyclicism exceeds that of its

[26] In his analysis of Franck's piano quintet, Clevenger makes the same point: "Because the cyclic theme remains formally external to the primary thematic argument of each movement, it may be said to have a macro-formal rather than micro-formal place in the piece. Its thematic significance is extrinsic, serving to unite the three movements of the work overall, rather than intrinsic to the form of any one movement." John Clevenger, "The Origins of Debussy's Style" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 2002), 589.

predecessors.[27] Thus d'Indy devotes considerable space to analyzing this work and hailing its significance as the next step in the development of the cyclic sonata. Indeed, the accumulation and integration of themes throughout the four movements of the violin sonata is exceptional in Franck's oeuvre: The second movement twice recalls the opening theme of the first, the third movement recalls both a theme from the second movement and the opening theme of the first, and the fourth movement brings back two themes from the third movement in addition to the opening theme from the first. Unlike the piano quintet, where the appearance of the cyclic theme had appeared almost as a secondary element in each movement, the recurring themes in the violin sonata are intrinsic to the movement in which they appear. For example, the two themes of the third movement that return in the fourth are so firmly embedded in their different musical surroundings that it becomes hard to judge the exact nature of their provenance: Their appearance in the third movement may be interpreted as a foreshadowing of their definitive arrival in the fourth; but alternatively, their appearance in the fourth may be heard as a recollection of the third.

Finally, d'Indy includes the key scheme of a multimovement composition in his discussion of the cyclic sonata, noting that "the tonality itself is capable of cooperating in the cyclic unity of a work" (386, 619). Using Franck's piano quintet as his model once again, d'Indy shows how the F minor tonality of the first movement progresses, via the central movement, to the "clearer final tonality" (387, 620) of F major in the finale:

> The slow central section is placed in the intermediate tonality of a minor, related through its third (c) and through its minor mode to the key in which it starts, and through its tonic (a) to the ending key [387, 620].

By using the key of A minor as a bridge between the tonic minor and parallel major of the outer movements, d'Indy claims that the piano quintet presents a "cyclic use of the progression of tonalities" (387, 619), one that forms an integral part of the cyclicism of the work as a whole. In the next volume of the *Cours* (in a chapter devoted to chamber music with piano), d'Indy expands on this interpretation of the piano quintet, describing how the keys of F minor and F major act as "poles of attraction, always in antagonism, until the victory of one over

[27] See Pasler, "Conflicting Notions of Progress," 401–6. Brian Hart refers to this next step in the evolution of the cyclic sonata as "increased cyclic organicism" or "rigorous organic cyclicism." See Brian Jack Hart, "The Symphony in Theory and Practice in France, 1900–1914" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana Univ., 1994), 87n46 and 91n56 respectively.

the other."[28] Recasting his previous analytic comments in light of this metaphor, the A minor tonality of the slow movement now "is connected by its mode to the dark pole [pôle sombre] of f minor and to the light pole [pôle clair] by its proximity to the dominant."[29] Moreover, the first movement draws upon darker tonalities on the flat side of the key or, as d'Indy states, "in the direction of the sub-dominant," while the final movement invokes the brighter tonalities of the sharp side, "in the direction of the dominant."[30] The eventual triumph of the major tonic over the minor—or metaphorically, of light over darkness—ends the antagonism between keys. D'Indy extends this conflict to the contrasting ideas presented in the introduction of the piano quintet, where the *dramatico* theme of measures 1–5 and the lyrical and *espressivo* theme of measures 6–13 anticipate the opposition between the two cyclic tonalities.

Debussy's close knowledge of Franck's quintet and his symphony (which also follows a progression from minor to major over the course of its three movements) perhaps influenced the tonal design of his quartet. At the simplest level, the G minor/Phrygian mode of the quartet's opening is transformed by the end to G major.[31] The journey from minor to major becomes especially noticeable in the last movement, where the same progression takes place in microcosm as it engages the themes of the finale. Borrowing d'Indy's rhetoric, we can say that these themes take on antagonistic characteristics and engage in a battle for supremacy. The opening of the finale presents two themes, a G minor first theme and a lyrical second theme (derived from the dotted rhythms of the first), which appear at first to comprise the main thematic material of the movement (Exs. 5a and b). Yet after the timbral recall beginning in measure 125, which introduces the cyclic theme into the main body of the finale for the first time, all three themes vie for prominence, with the cyclic theme ultimately overwhelming the other two by the end of the movement.

The three concluding statements of the cyclic theme demonstrate how this dramatic reversal is achieved. The first statement occurs in measures 181–88, where the cyclic theme appears *fortissimo* (*avec pas-*

[28] Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale, Deuxième livre, seconde partie* (Paris: Durand, 1933), 200. The second part of vol. 2 is based on d'Indy's lectures at the Schola Cantorum from 1901 to 1902.

[29] D'Indy, *Cours*, 2.2, 200.

[30] Ibid.
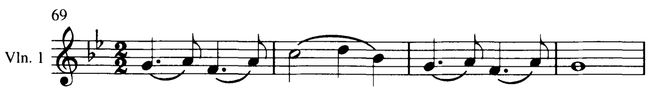
[31] The slow movement of Debussy's quartet stands literally halfway between these two poles with the tritone-related key signatures of D♭ major and C♯ minor. While the key relationship would be too unorthodox for d'Indy, the slow movement could still represent an intermediate point: the C♭ minor key signature of the central section would connect by its minor mode to the opening movement, while the D♭ major outer sections would connect by its mode to the finale.

EXAMPLE 5

(a) Debussy, String Quartet, iv, mm. 31–32



(b) Debussy, String Quartet, iv, mm. 69–72



sion et très soutenu), in C major, in augmentation, and superimposed over a C bass pedal. Immediately prior to this high point, the cyclic theme and the finale's first theme had appeared in counterpoint, first in measures 165–70 between the first and second violins, and then in measures 171–74 between the viola and second violin. The subsequent climactic appearance of the cyclic theme leaves little doubt as to which theme has won the contrapuntal battle. After a brief passage where the first theme temporarily regains prominence (mm. 216–51), the two themes return. Now the relationship between them is clearly skewed in favor of the cyclic theme, which returns in the key of G major (mm. 252–67). Meanwhile the first theme—now in the major mode and sublimated into the musical filigree—connects repeated statements of the cyclic theme. By the third statement of the cyclic theme (mm. 326–33), all that remains is a two-measure reminiscence of the finale's second theme (mm. 334–35) before the movement's unambiguous close in G major.

It is perhaps not surprising that Debussy's quartet correlates well with d'Indy's account of the cyclic sonata, as both composers were indebted to Franck: Debussy alluded to several of the cyclic techniques found in Franck's quintet and quartet, while d'Indy theorized upon them. Yet in each case, Franck's cyclicism was adapted to fit the composers' unique needs. Debussy's version of cyclicism elevates the role of timbre and limits the more prosaic idea of thematic recollection. D'Indy's account of Franck's cyclicism, on the other hand, favors works with increased levels of thematic recall and integration in accordance with his view of music history, which in turn serves his own cultural-political interests.

Cyclic Design in Debussy's Sonatas

In comparing Debussy's early and late chamber works, and the cyclic procedures they embraced, it becomes apparent that the manner

in which he engaged with this tradition changed considerably over the course of his career. While he wholeheartedly entered into the spirit of Franck's cyclicism in his string quartet, by the time of the sonatas his engagement with cyclic procedures is much more circumspect. Debussy's cautious handling of the cyclic sonata in his late chamber music can perhaps be attributed to d'Indy's idiosyncratic interpretation of Franck's legacy. While Debussy had no quarrel with Franck, he would not want to be identified with a musical heritage that began with Beethoven and culminated with d'Indy and his students at the Schola Cantorum. Moreover, d'Indy's virulently nationalistic reading of the French cyclic sonata only gained currency with the advent of the First World War. As Carlo Caballero states: "Within the French musical world of the first decade of the twentieth century, form had much more than a merely formal meaning: cyclical forms carried a political charge."[32]

Perhaps in order to avoid any overt political statement, Debussy drew attention to a different source of inspiration for his late sonatas. In a letter to Stravinsky dated 24 October 1915, Debussy states:

> I've actually written nothing except "pure" music: twelve Etudes for piano; two sonatas for various instruments, in the old French style which was kind enough not to ask for tetralogical efforts from its listeners.[33]

Recovering the "old French style"—that is, the tradition of Rameau and Couperin—was a theme that pervaded Debussy's critical writings, becoming especially pronounced in the war years. According to Debussy, the loss of a French musical tradition was the direct result of a persistent and stifling Austro-Germanic influence, one that he believed consumed native French artistic sensibilities. In an article published in January 1913, his polemic laments the neglect of this heritage:

> Why are we so indifferent toward our own great Rameau? And toward Destouches, now almost forgotten? And to Couperin, the most poetic of our harpsichordists, whose tender melancholy is like that enchanting echo that emanates from the depths of a Watteau landscape, filled with plaintive figures? When we compare ourselves to other countries

[32] Carlo Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 143.

[33] Debussy, *Letters*, 309. Debussy's quip about "tetralogical efforts" could be interpreted several ways. First, it may simply refer to four-movement formats as opposed to three. Second, it could refer to the brevity and conciseness of his sonatas, in contrast to *La tétralogie*, the French designation for Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Glenn Watkins believes that Debussy's statement refers to "the use of cyclical leitmotifs in Wagner's *Ring*," which accords well with the sonatas in that they employ just a single instance of thematic recall (discussed below). See Glenn Watkins, *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 454n75.

—so mindful of the glories of the past—we realize that there is no excuse for our indifference. The impression with which we are left is that we scarcely care at all for our fame, for not one of these people is ever to be seen on our concert programs. . . . On the other hand, we do find *Parsifal*.[34]

For Debussy, Rameau and Couperin provided the link to a purely French musical tradition whose attributes of clarity, subtlety, wit, and nuance served as a necessary antidote to Teutonic heaviness, pomp, and grandeur. The sonatas themselves bear evidence of what Caballero describes as Debussy's "historic freight."[35] With respect to their outward appearance, Debussy does much to connect these chamber works to a French musical heritage. For the first time he signs himself as "Claude Debussy, musicien français," and as Vallas notes, he wished to have this title "engraved with a quaint ornamentation in imitation of the old French style."[36] The titles of the individual movements—Prologue, Sérénade (cello sonata), Pastorale, Interlude (trio sonata), and Intermède (violin sonata)—distance themselves from the 19th-century sonata and recall instead 18th-century movement titles. And according to Scott Messing, Debussy's desired association with Rameau and Couperin extends beyond mere superficialities. Between 1905 and 1908, Debussy "acquired an acute knowledge of Rameau's music" when he edited Rameau's opera *Les fêtes de Polymnie* for the *Oeuvres complètes*.[37] Messing finds rhythmic similarities—specifically a recurring triplet figure—in the opening of the opera and Debussy's cello sonata, both significantly entitled Prologue, and he points to other gestural affinities: the recurring dotted figures of the "Prélude" from act 1, scene 1 of Rameau's opera and the "Tempo di minuetto" from the sonata for flute, viola, and harp, and a similar melodic fragment in Couperin's *Les goûts réunis, Septième concert* and that same sonata's "Pastorale."[38]

But along with echoes of Rameau and Couperin, an equally compelling voice resounds from a more recent French past. Despite Debussy's

[34] Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, 273.

[35] Carlo Caballero, "Patriotism or Nationalism? Fauré and the Great War," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52 (1999): 620.

[36] Vallas, *Debussy*, 260.

[37] Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 45–49.

[38] A fact often cited to show Debussy's allegiance to the 18th century in his cello sonata is the supposed reference to the commedia dell' arte tradition in the subtitle to the second movement of this work, "Pierrot fâché avec la lune." According to François Lesure, this title comes not from Debussy but from Louis Rosoor, a cello professor from the Lille Conservatoire, who handed out descriptive commentaries to Debussy's cello sonata, claiming they were the composer's own. See François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: Biographie critique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 398–99. For the letters in which Debussy complains of Rosoor to Durand, see Debussy, *Letters*, 318–20.

emphasis on French music of the 18th century, in the construction of his sonatas he turned to more recent French precursors, the cyclic works of César Franck. As noted above, all three sonatas link their outer movements by recalling a theme from the first movement in the last. There is little mystery concerning the cyclic design of the sonata for flute, viola, and harp: Debussy clearly labels the point of thematic return in the last movement with the performance direction *Mouvt de la* "Pastorale." Similarly, the return of the oft-repeated opening theme of the violin sonata occurs immediately and prominently in the opening measures of the finale. In each case, Debussy simply recalls the theme and moves on, with little attempt to further integrate the quoted material. This approach to cyclic technique resembles the limited thematic recall of Franck's quintet rather than the more abundant cyclic connections—d'Indy's preferred paradigm—of the violin sonata. Indeed, Debussy may have been consciously associating himself with the Franckiste tradition rather than the d'Indyiste one. Brian Hart distinguishes between the two:

> *Franckistes* and *d'Indystes* did not always form a unified block. D'Indy's disciples generally held to their teacher's idiosyncratic interpretation of Franck's persona and message, as well as to his polemical opinions on the Conservatoire and the state, both of which had nothing to do with Franck. Franck's own disciples, on the other hand, shared more affinity with the master's disinterested and spiritual approach to art. Most *Franckistes* sympathized with the Schola but sometimes held to social and political positions far removed from those of d'Indy.[39]

If the cyclic sonata at this time carried too much of d'Indy's political baggage, then Debussy's single instance of thematic recall in his sonatas leans more toward Franck. Indeed, Debussy's more restrained use of cyclic procedures suggests that he may have been seeking to pry the Franckiste tradition from d'Indy's grip. By drawing on a different paradigm for the construction of his cyclic sonatas, Debussy's late chamber works carve out a space for a Franckiste tradition uncontaminated by d'Indy.[40]

Debussy's cello sonata, however, differs from the others in that the cyclic theme is more thoroughly integrated into the work as a whole, and the result is a design that comes closer to d'Indy's prescriptions for

[39] Hart, "The Symphony in Theory and Practice in France," 43n46.

[40] For a different reading of Debussy's cello sonata, one that also links it to d'Indy and the wartime cultural context, see Jane F. Fulcher, "Speaking the Truth to Power: the Dialogic Element in Debussy's Wartime Compositions," in Fulcher, ed., *Debussy and His World*, 222–24.

the cyclic sonata. Perhaps aware of this affinity, Debussy tries to disguise it by drawing attention to the "wrong" cyclic theme. One would expect the cyclic material of the cello sonata to be its first musical statement (Ex. 6a), as this opening material dominates the first movement. The melodic contour, combined with its initial triplet figure, fulfills d'Indy's requirements for a memorable musical design, and its reiteration at crucial junctures throughout the movement establishes its importance. Example 6 traces the appearance of the introductory theme in the Prologue.
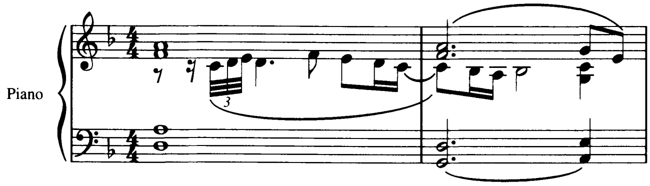
After the piano introduction, the triplet rhythm appears twice in the cello line between measures 16 and 20, the second of these statements presenting a rhythmic and melodic variant of the opening (Ex. 6b). This variant foreshadows perhaps the most significant restatement of the opening theme, which occurs at the climax of the movement (Ex. 6c). Here it appears with the melodic intervals of the original intact, though it maintains the previous transposition level. In the following measures, both versions of the introductory theme occur side by side, at the original pitch level in measure 33 and then at the transposed level in measure 34, the latter now presented in rhythmic augmentation (Ex. 6d). To close the movement, the opening theme returns in its most complete statement thus far, and then fragments to just the triplet rhythm in the reiterations of the final measures (Ex. 6e).

With this level of emphasis, one would expect some form of the thematic material of Example 6 to recur in the last movement as the cyclic theme. Yet perversely, Debussy's cyclic theme turns out to be not the pervasive introductory theme but rather an idea that appears only once, in measures 31–32 of the Prologue, nestled between repeated statements of the introductory theme (Exs. 7a and b). Debussy's last-movement recall of this theme is certainly noticeable: He sets it apart from the movement as a whole by having the cello perform it unaccompanied and giving it the special tempo designation *Largo (la moitié plus lent)*. But by using material from the first movement that in all likelihood would not be remembered from its single statement, Debussy subverts one of the tenets of cyclic organization—the recognizability of the theme.
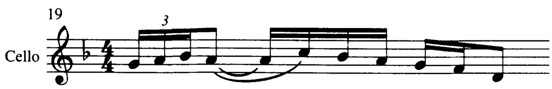
Even while manipulating one convention of cyclic design, Debussy adheres to another in that the single appearance of the cyclic theme in the finale is integrated into the movement as a whole. Its eventual appearance is prepared as early as the closing measures of the Sérénade: Following a brief reprise (mm. 54–57, repeating mm. 3–5), the following *au Mouvt* section (mm. 59–64) provides a transition to the finale, which continues *attacca* (Ex. 8). The A pedal of the piano accompaniment in measures 59–64 anticipates the A dominant pedal that occurs

EXAMPLE 6. Debussy, Cello Sonata
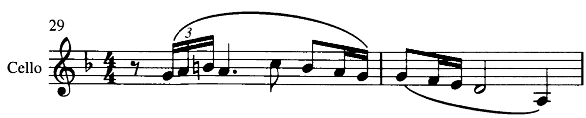
(a) i, mm. 1–2
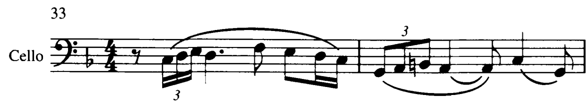


(b) i, m. 19



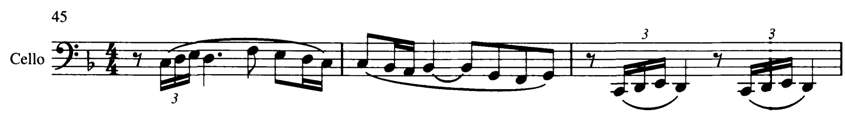
(c) i, mm. 29–30



(d) i, mm. 33–34
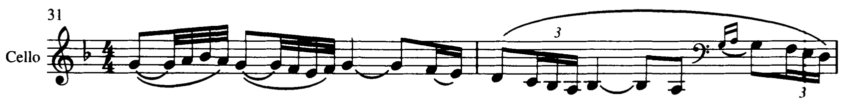


(e) i, mm. 45–47
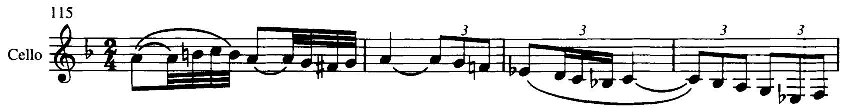


an octave lower in the opening measures of the finale (mm. 3ff). Likewise, the descending eighth-note figure presented by the piano in measures 61–62 recurs an octave lower in measures 1–2 of the finale, where it is heard as an inner voice in the left hand along with the cello. While the piano accompaniment of measures 59–64 connects to the immediately following movement, the cello line in these same measures (mm. 59–64) looks much further ahead as it prepares for the appearance of the cyclic theme that will occur over a hundred measures later.

EXAMPLE 7. Debussy, Cello Sonata

(a) i, mm. 31–32



(b) iii, mm. 115–18
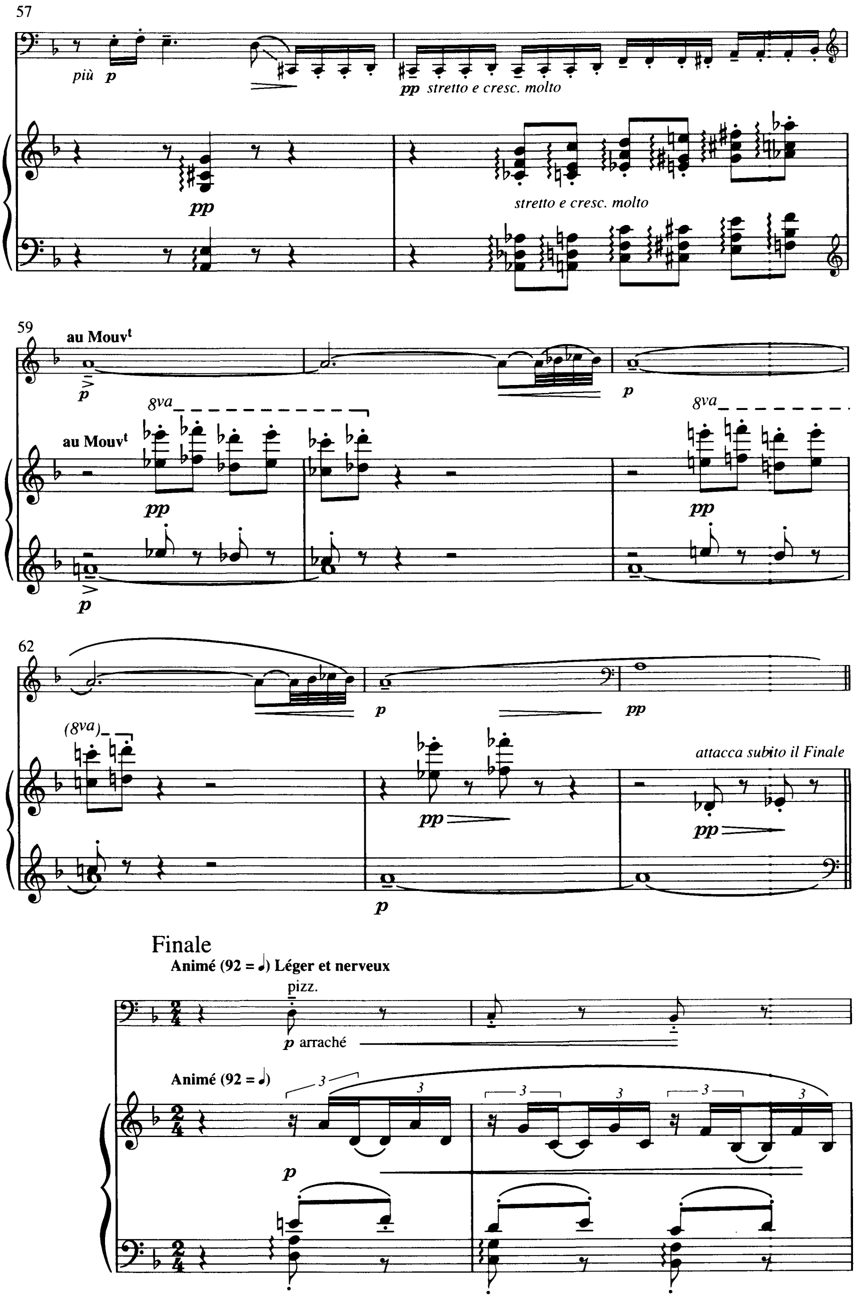


Comparing these measures with the eventual appearance of the cyclic theme (Ex. 7b), the cello line establishes the opening pitch and register of the cyclic theme, and presents the rhythm and a chromaticized version of its first turn figure.
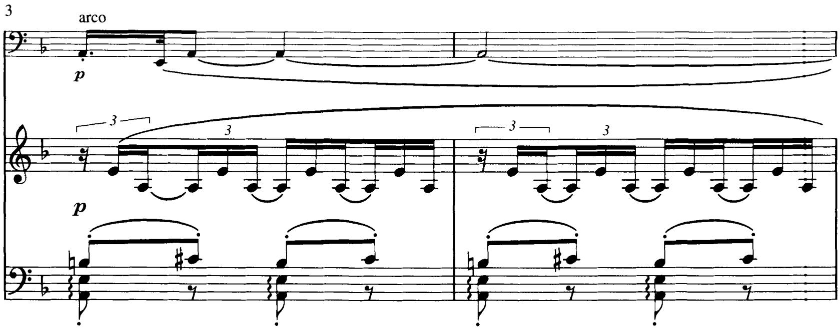
Other features of the finale help integrate the theme in its new surroundings. The halving of the tempo (*la moitié plus lent*) is not altogether surprising in light of the movement's previous interruptions that had temporarily halted the momentum and bucolic mood of the predominant tempo *Animé* (later referred to as *1er Mouvt*) with contrasting material at much slower tempos: the *Rubato* of measures 23–36 and the *Lento* passage of measures 57–68 (Table 2). These sections could be seen to correspond to the contrasting episodes of a rondo, especially since after each there is a return to the refrain—the *1er Mouvt* and a repetition of its musical material. Against this back drop, the appearance of the cyclic theme (mm. 115–18) constitutes a final episode, its presence continuing a pattern of interruption that has already been established.

Two additional, separate processes prepare for the entrance of the cyclic theme at the end of the finale (Ex. 9). First, the contrasting episodes, *Rubato* and *Lento,* introduce the rhythm of the cyclic theme and then its turn figure. Measures 22–26 present this rhythm in the piano accompaniment, first in measure 22 to segue into the *Rubato* section, and then again in the accompaniment in measures 24 and 26. Likewise, in measures 57 and 63 of the *Lento* section, the cello and piano present a rhythmic variant of the cyclic theme, now featuring the turn figure as well (Ex. 9a–c). The second process operates in the *Animé* sections of the work, anticipating not only the rhythm and contour of the cyclic theme but also its register (Ex. 9d–f). In measures 49 and 51, the cello presents two statements featuring the turn figure of the

EXAMPLE 8. Debussy, Cello Sonata, ii, mm. 57–64; iii, mm. 1–4



EXAMPLE 8. (*continued*)



cyclic theme, the first beginning on E♭, the second transposed up a step to F. This material repeats in measure 104, now a step higher again and one step away from its eventual appearance as the moment of thematic recall, beginning on A in measure 115. Thus the successive appearances of the turn-figure rhythm in the *Animé* sections of the finale ascend by step (E♭, F, and G) to attain the pitch level of the cyclic statement. Significantly, all come in pairs, in contrast to the single appearance at the end of the second movement, in preparation for the final cyclic recall.

In sum, the cello sonata presents a distinctly integrated cyclic design, first by connecting the second and third movements with a transitional passage (mm. 59–64), then by linking the third movement with the first by means of a cyclic theme, and finally by preparing for the appearance of the cyclic theme from the end of the second movement onwards. But the cyclicism of the cello sonata is not as readily apparent as the above description might imply. It is still possible for the pivotal moment in cyclic design—the point of thematic recall—to pass by unrecognized owing to Debussy's curious choice of theme. By recalling a passage that had appeared only once, and by diverting attention to the oft-repeated introductory theme, Debussy disguises what would otherwise have been a straightforward cyclic enterprise.

Conclusion

Debussy's insistence that he was writing in the "old French style" adds a new dimension to the sonatas, as the apparent influences of Rameau and Couperin stand beside a more modern procedure, the cyclic sonata of César Franck. While Debussy acknowledges, even emphasizes, the heritage of Rameau and Couperin, its musical effect in

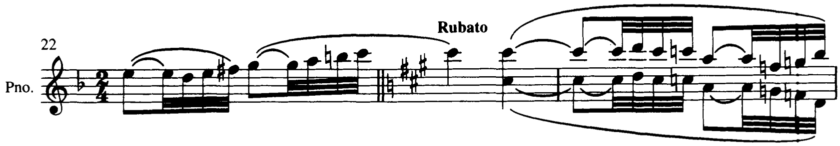
TABLE 2

Formal outline of Debussy's Cello Sonata, finale
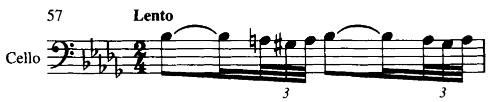
A	B	A + new material	C	new material + A	D (cyclic theme)	A
mm. 1–22 *Animé*	23–36 *Rubato/ Stretto*	37–44, 45–56 *1er Mouvt, Con fuoco ed appassionato*	57–68 *Lento*	69–84, 85–114 *1er Mouvt*	115–118 *Largo (la moitié plus lent)*	119–123 *1er Mouvt*

EXAMPLE 9. Debussy, Cello Sonata

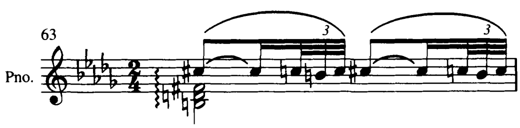
(a) iii, mm. 22–24



(b) iii, m. 57



(c) iii, m. 63



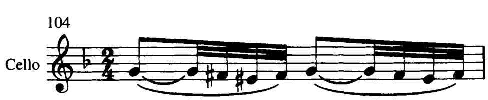
(d) iii, m. 49



(e) iii, m. 51



(f) iii, m. 104



the sonatas is subtle and perhaps intangible. On the other hand, Franck's influence goes unacknowledged, but its musical effect is undeniable. Debussy seems to be underplaying his connection to the cyclic sonata—now possibly too tainted by its association with d'Indy and the Schola Cantorum—in order to carve out a place for himself within a less contentious musical tradition. Why then the continued allegiance to cyclic forms in the late sonatas if their associations were so fraught? After nearly three decades of employing cyclicism in his multimovement works (from *Printemps* of 1887 to the violin sonata of 1917), Debussy may have felt that cyclic procedures were an intrinsic part of his compositional style, despite their current implications. Or perhaps since the genre of the sonata carried more Austro-German associations than French, Debussy turned to the cyclic sonata in its most recent French incarnation to counter this Teutonic legacy. Regardless of his motivations, his positioning of the sonatas seems to draw a fine line between openly engaging with a cyclic tradition and concealing any tendency toward increased cyclic integration. Or more pointedly, Debussy draws unambiguous allegiances to a Franckiste tradition of the cyclic sonata while turning away from what that tradition had come to represent *vis-à-vis* d'Indy.

By comparison, Debussy's quartet appears to be unencumbered by such concerns. Written a quarter of a century earlier, the cyclic sonata had not yet acquired its political charge, and Debussy was able to compose more freely. Unlike the sonatas—which use the bare minimum of thematic recall to connect outer movements—the quartet prominently features the cyclic theme in three of its four movements. As a calling card to the Société Nationale, it is unabashedly cyclic in its presentation, drawing not only on cyclic procedures in general but those of Franck's quartet in particular. As Laurence Berman succinctly puts it: Debussy "aspires to a certain 'legitimacy' in the eyes of those who have set the price of legitimacy."[41] Thus the political motivations of the string quartet seem to be the reverse of the sonatas. As a young composer, Debussy chose to showcase cyclic procedures in his quartet as a way to ingratiate himself with a group of influential composers. At the end of his career, as an established composer, he underplays the same cyclic procedures in order to distance himself from any undesirable musical allegiances. In each case the figure of d'Indy looms large, whether as president of the Société Nationale when Debussy submitted his string quartet, or as a composer and pedagogue of stature whose views on cyclicism had become well known. It would appear that the more d'Indy appropriated

[41] Laurence Berman, "The Evolution of Tonal Thinking in the Works of Claude Debussy" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard Univ., 1965), 99.

the Franckiste tradition, the less Debussy felt inclined to engage openly with the cyclic sonata.

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ABSTRACT

In 1915, Debussy returned to the genre of chamber music for the first time since the String Quartet of 1893 and composed the only sonatas of his career. What draws these early and late chamber works together is that they are all cyclic in construction. While Debussy's quartet clearly bears the imprint of César Franck's cyclic procedures, his sonatas engage with this tradition more cautiously. Comparing the string quartet with the sonatas elucidates Debussy's uneasy *rapprochement* with a style he had formerly embraced. Debussy's underplaying of the cyclic tradition was motivated by what the cyclic sonata had come to represent in the intervening years, in particular its appropriation by Franck's student Vincent d'Indy. In his teachings and publications, d'Indy promulgated a nationalistic view of the cyclic sonata, one that declared Franck and the modern French school as the only comprehending heirs of Beethoven. Reluctant to participate in this particular heritage, Debussy diverted attention from the cyclic procedures used in the sonatas by explicitly emphasizing their stylistic affiliation with the French 18th century and by implicitly aligning himself with Franck rather than with d'Indy. In this way Debussy sought to carve out a place for his sonatas within a less contentious tradition.